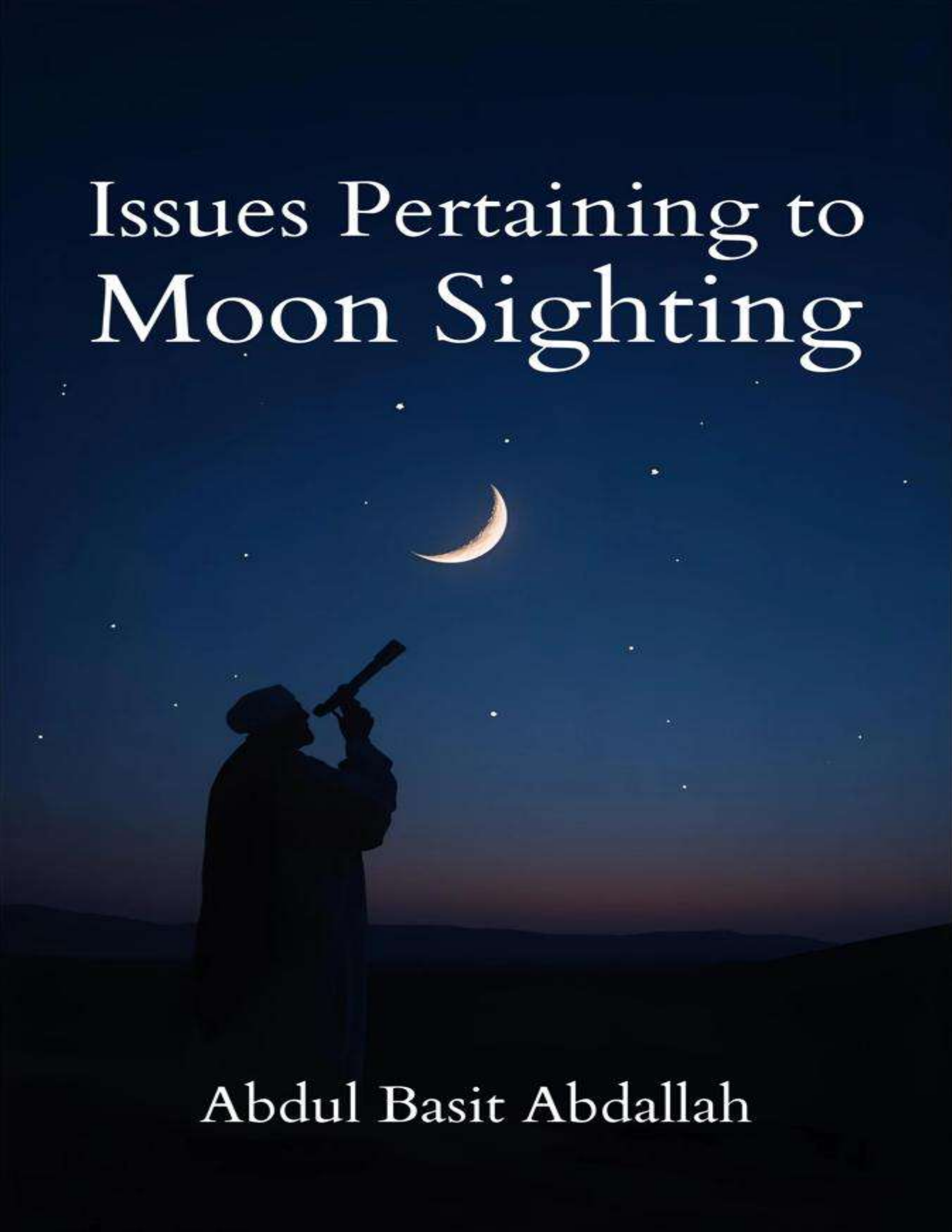
Issues Pertaining to Moon Sighting



Abdul Basit Abdallah

Issues Pertaining to Moon-Sighting

-2nd Edition

Abdul Basit Abdallah

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

Dedication

I dedicate this book to;

My father, ***Siraju-Deen*** whose childhood and youth were robbed from him by illness;

my grandpa, ***Umar Sualah Banda***, a well-to-do contractor, who lived it all and lost it all;

and all departed souls who have not left behind offspring(s) to carry on the mantle and to pray for them.

May they find in death solace and may their hereafter be enviable and may we meet in al-Jannah.

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Introduction

The biggest setback in human history was dissension. Take conflict of interest out and most wars would not have occurred to begin with. So, dealing with discordance has been the most difficult task for mankind. Matters of religion in this regard were no different. Right from the demise of the Messenger ﷺ, disagreement started occurring between the companions (R.A.) regarding ruling on religious affairs. Contrary to a popular opinion, disagreement is not a good thing because while agreement seeks to encourage unity, disagreement fuels disparity.

Matters of Islamic jurisprudence are influenced the most and one of such is ***moon-sighting***. Since commencing the month of fasting, month of Ramadan and breaking the fast or commencing the month of Shawwal mainly depends on moon-sighting, it is essential to give it a great deal of attention. Thus, the reason for this small piece of writing.

Here in Ghana, it is almost impossible not to argue annually concerning moon-sighting. Some limit moon-sighting to the local region (nation), some international and some make use of calendar. Each party defends its stance with all will and chest stuck out but what is the right way and how can we resolve or at least draw closer to unity, given our differences?

Let us delve into the topic and see what scholars held of opinions and what was closer to the truth. I have chosen to refer more to a paper by ***Dr. Abdul Salam bun Muhammad ash-Shuway'ir*** titled ***"Contemporary Issues in Fasting"*** for the introductory aspect, given the fact that he presented significant points to the topic. Also, I will refer to ***"Drawing Attention to the Unification of Muslims in Fasting and Breaking the Fast"*** by ***Shaikh Ahmad al-Ghumari***. Other sources used will be referenced, in sha Allah.

May Allah make this work of benefit to us all and to the entire Islamic Ummah, especially nations facing moon-sighting crisis.

Abdul Basit Abdallah

April 2, 2025.

Issues Pertaining to Moon-sighting

This chapter will focus on some key matters discussed by Dr. Abdul Salam bun Muhammad ash-Shuway'ir in his paper "***Contemporary Issues in Fasting***", the origin of which was from a lecture he delivered.

Commencement time for Ramadan:

Allah ﷻ said:

"The month of Ramadan in which was revealed the Quran, a guidance for mankind and clear proofs for the guidance and the criterion (between right and wrong). So whoever of you sights (the crescent on the first night of) the month (of Ramadan i.e. is present at his home), he must observe Saum (fasts) that month." [Surah Al – Baqarah: 185]

Meaning, observing Saum (Ramadan) in the month of Ramadan is obligatory. Also, the criterion for knowing the beginning and the ending of the month of Ramadan is by the rising of the crescent and subsequently sighting it. In an authentic report from the Messenger ﷺ, he said:

"When you see the crescent then fast, and when you see it then break the fast".

[Al-Bukhari (1909) and Muslim (1081)]

There is evidence without a shred of doubt that the criterion for starting and ending it depends on moon-sighting. The Prophet ﷺ affirmed this by saying: "We are an unlettered Ummah[1]; we do not write or calculate".[2] This proves the dependency on moon-sighting. Some scholars, including Shaykhul Islam Taqiyu – deen Ibn Taymiyyah (728 A.H.) had cited a consensus of the scholars on the fact that Ramadan commences only by moon-sighting or by the completeness of the month (of Sha'ban). Apart from these two, no other factor is considered.

[1] Nation
[2] Al-Bukhari (1913) and Muslim (1080).

Matters relative to Moon-sighting:

1. Sighting the moon using optical instrument that enhances the vision

   Question: Is it permissible for a person to sight the moon using a vision enhancing device such as the telescope and the likes?

   Response: It is okay to do so and moon sighted through such devices (binoculars, telescopes, etc.) is regarded.

2. Traveling beyond the clouds to sight the moon

   Question: In an instance where the people decide to either sight the moon by sending out a small aircraft or by using a satellite in the sky that travels above the clouds, is such considered as moon-sighting?

   Response: No, the Messenger ﷺ said: “But if clouds are sent to conceal the crescent from you then complete the number of days (of the month of Sha’ban)”. Also, mostly, matters of the deen are presumptive. Take for instance the position of the Qibla (for someone outside Makkah). The second point is, the Islamic law does not burden us with hardship. For this reason, the Messenger ﷺ said: “We are an unlettered nation”. Meaning, our affairs are easy. So, if we are to consider this (traveling beyond the sky for moon-sighting), it would have been difficult and burdensome.

3. Astronomical Calculations (Calendar)

   Question: Is it okay to depend on astronomical calculations (calendar)?

   Response: We first have to establish the fact that sighting the moon is not solely focused on the birth of the crescent. Yes, undoubtedly, the birth and emergence of the crescent can be calculated but that is not the factor to consider.

   Howbeit, scholars differed in opinion regarding how long it takes for the crescent to be visible to the eye after its birth. Eyes also differ in the level of strength and vision. The reality is that the difference among those of the

view of astronomical calculations is not focused on the moon-sighting itself but on the duration of possibility for sighting the crescent and this is not something conclusive. While a person with a strong vision would sight the moon, others with weaker vision might not be able to sight it and the Prophet's ﷺ command was "When you see the crescent then fast"

[Muslim (1081)]

Meaning, sighting the crescent is what is to be considered and this involves the possibility of sighting it or otherwise but as for the emergence of the crescent, it is a sure fact but when it is possible to be seen is debated upon by the very scholars holding the view of astronomical calculations.

Majority of scholars had cited that astronomical calculation is not to be considered completely. The Messenger ﷺ said: "We are an unlettered nation; we cannot read or calculate". Even so, some companions were said to calculate. In fact, it was reported that one of the Tabi'een used to say: "It is possible for me to know the beginning of the month by calculating the one before it. A writer named Buhlul or Ibn Buhlul reported this in a book titled "Ad-Dala'il fi Ilm al-Falaq". He stated that some people from the earlier generations used to hold this opinion. Yes, the Arab knew about astronomical calculation, even though it was in a different form and later possibly developed. The point is, calculation is relied upon as established earlier on. *Ibn as-Subkiy (771 A.H.)* was the first to introduce the opinion of calculation among scholars. After discovering reports from earlier generations, they were used to support his argument. As for what was related to Mutarrif bun Abdillah on astronomical calculation, it is inauthentic.

Question: Is each country supposed to consider only moon-sighting within its region or not?

Response: There is a long argument among scholars concerning this issue. The popular opinion in the Hanbali school of Islamic jurisprudence is that difference of horizons is not regarded and that whenever the crescent is sighted in one of the Islamic nations (regardless of distance) then it is binding on the entire Islamic Ummah to fast. For the Messenger ﷺ said: "Fast when you see it (the crescent) and break the fast when you see it"

[Al-Bukhari (1909) and Muslim (1081)]

He did not say each country has specific horizons, distinct from others.

The second opinion – which was the opinion of Shaykhul Islam Ibn Taymiyyah – is that the difference of horizons is acceptable. Based on this, each region will have a common horizon. The evidence for this is the hadith of Kuraib in Sahih Muslim – and this was the opinion of al-Imam ash-Shafi'e.

On the authority of Ibn 'Abbas that Kuraib came to Ibn 'Abbas and informed him that Mu'awiyah and his people went out to sight the crescent in Syria and they were able to sight it on the night of Jum'ah[1]. Meaning, they fasted on Friday. Then Ibn 'Abbas replied: We on the other hand sighted the crescent on Saturday. Therefore, we are completing the month (30 days) so far as we have not sighted the crescent before then. He then mentioned at the end that it was what the Messenger ﷺ instructed[2].

Scholars of the Hanbali school of Islamic jurisprudence explained this to be that Ibn 'Abbas's first statement was on the commencement of Ramadan and that what he meant was "We did not start the Saum (fasting) with you guys because we did not know of your sighting. So, our fasts are valid and

[1] The night before Jum'ah (Friday).

[2] We will delve into this hadith and arguments regarding it later in this piece, in sha Allah.

we will continue to the end of the month." He did not say "Well, the horizons are different".

Now, here comes the complexity, those who regarded the difference of the horizons all agreed that a big country normally has different horizons. This means each subregion has to sight the crescent on their own. With regard to those who do not consider the difference in horizons, we say, countries today have different authoritative bodies and it is not binding on them to follow the ruling of a specific country. To harmonize between these two stances, we have to make use of "***At-Talfeeq bayna al-Qaulayn***" which means, to introduce a third stance concerning a debated upon issue and this is acceptable so far as it does not wipe away completely the already established stances. For example, let us say there was an argument over a subject matter. Party A said it was permissible and party B said it was preferred. A third party that comes later cannot come up with say a prohibition ruling as it counters both the already existing stances and this is what is termed by scholars of *'Usul* as *Rafi'ul Khilaf*.

The ***Hay'at Kibar al-'Ulama*** came up with an acceptable third ruling[1] concerning what we are discussing that difference in horizons is not considered. However, each country should focus on their own sighting on the grounds that the supreme leader's opinion and that of the 'ulama of the land are considerable factors.

4. Unity

Question: Is it possible to unite Muslims upon the commencement of Ramadan and 'Eid al–Fitr?

Response: All scholars agreed upon the fact that it is obligatory on the Muslims to unite regarding Hajj (pilgrimage) and 'Eid al-Adha. As for Ramadan, a lot of 'Ulama, in fact the Jumhur (majority) are of the opinion that each country should regard its own sighting. As for unity, Muslims are

[1] Fatwa by Hay'atu Kibar Al – Ulama, 1392 A.H.

united on many grounds including the Qibla, Hajj, etc. Besides, if we truly wish to unite the Muslim Ummah then the best is to consider the opinion that disregards difference in horizons.

5. The supreme Imam's opinion

Question: Is the supreme Imam of the land's opinion a considerable factor for the commencement of Ramadan?

Response: Yes, and the evidence for this is that a man who sighted the crescent came and informed the Messenger ﷺ and his sighting was considered. According to the Hanbali school of Islamic jurisprudence, the commencement of Ramadan is based on the sighting of a single person and that of 'Eid al-Fitr is based on the sighting of two persons. The *Jumhur* on the other hand, hold the view that two persons are required for the commencement of both Ramadan and 'Eid al-Fitr.

Again, the Messenger ﷺ said: "The day of commencement of fast is the day the people commence fast and the day of breaking fast ('Eid al-Fitr) is the day the people break their fast".

[at-Tirmidhi (697)]

The considerable factor here is what the people agree upon. If they have a supreme Imam then they all unite under his Ijtihad[1]. Thus, they commence fast and observe 'Eid based on his Ijtihad.

[1] Personal reasoning.

Juristic Scenario

Case 1:

An Islamic country makes use of astronomical calculation (calendar) for both commencement of Ramadan and observance of 'Eid. In this same country is a group of students of knowledge who hold the opinion that astronomical calculation (calendar) is not a considerable factor. Even though the calendar for the present year suggested the month of Sha'ban would be a thirty (30) day period, Mr. Jamal, a Muslim happened to sight the moon in the evening of 29th Sha'ban.

a) Are the students of knowledge supposed to fast together with the people of the land or they are at liberty to disregard the astronomical calculation and observe fast based on their own sighting?
b) Can Mr. Jamal observe fast on his own or wait to join the people of his nation?

Answer

a) The students of knowledge should observe fast together with the people of the land.
b) Mr. Jamal should observe fast secretly, based on his own sighting. However, no one is to observe fast in the land based on Mr. Jamal's sighting.

Case 2:

A man named Mr. Harun started his fast on Saturday in country A and traveled to country B, which started theirs on Sunday to continue his fast. Both countries happened not to sight the moon that year and thus, were to fast for thirty days. Mr. Zaid on the other hand began his fast in country B and traveled to country A to complete it. In the following year, Madam Najat started hers in country A and traveled to country B to complete it.

Both countries sighted the moon on the 29th but Country B started a day earlier.

After a careful analysis, the following were realized:

- Mr. Harun would have fasted for 31 days if he was to follow country B but 30 days if he was to follow his home country.
- Mr. Zaid would have fasted for 30 days if he followed his home country but 29 days if he followed country A.
- Madam Najat would have fasted for 29 days, following her home country but 28 days, following country B.

We will delve into the hadith on moon-sighting and arguments regarding it later in this piece, in sha Allah.

Questions:

a) Should Mr. Harun follow country A or Country B and in the case of a 31 days fast what should be done?
b) Should Mr. Zaid fast for 29 days or 30 days?
c) If Madam Najat decides to fast for 28 days, how is she to go about it?

Answer

a) Mr. Harun is to follow country B and fast for 31 days. The additional day fast would be considered as Nafl.
b) Mr. Zaid should fast for 29 days, following country A.
c) Madam Najat is to break her fast, following country A. However, she is to make up for a day to complete the month since she fasted for 28 days because the Islamic month is either 29 or 30 days as indicated by the Messenger ﷺ.

6. A country with neither a supreme Imam nor a crescent sighting body

Question: In a country, like say a western country, where there is no supreme Imam and no sighting body. What should be done?

Response: In the absence of supreme Imam, the Islamic body or the organization present in that particular country is to be considered. Their verdict is what is to be regarded. Mind you, this body can be the governing body of a Masjid, if it is the only one present. It is mandatory to follow it whether they go by crescent sighting or by astronomical calculation (calendar).

Well, in the absence of such body, we go back to the origin of the argument. If *Ikhtilaf al-Matali'* (difference in horizons of the sun) is disregarded then they are at liberty to consider the sighting of the country they trust the most. However, if they regard *Ikhtilaf Al – Matali'* then the nearest Islamic country[1] should be considered.

[1] or a country with Muslim population that sights the moon or calculates, depending on the decision made between ***moon-sighting*** and ***astronomical calculation***.

Introducing the book "Drawing Attention to the Unification of Muslims in Fasting and Breaking the Fast"

One of the insightful books on moon-sighting is Drawing Attention to the Unification of Muslims in Fasting and Breaking the Fast by ***Abu al-Fayd Ahmad bun Muhammad bun Siddiq al-Ghumari (1380 A.H.)***, except that there were some shortfalls here and there. For this, I will highlight few points from the book and leave out several others. ***Shareef Abu Muhammad Al – Hassan bun Ali al-Kattaniy al-Athariy*** took it upon himself in his introduction of the book in 1419 A.H. – 1999 C.E. and highlighted those shortfalls, giving the reader a heads-up. Below is what he wrote:

All thanks and praises be unto Allah the Exalted. We seek his aid and guidance. We seek his forgiveness and we repent to him. We seek refuge in Him against the evil of ourselves and our misdeeds. Whoever Allah guides, none can misguide and whoever Allah misguides, none can guide. I bear witness that there is no deity worthy of worship except Allah and Muhammad ﷺ is His slave and Messenger – May Allah's peace and blessings be upon him.

Now, this is an important piece of writing from the collection of al-Hafiz Abu al-Fayd Ahmad bun Muhammad bun as-Siddiq al-Ghumari – May Allah the Exalted have mercy on him. The author has explained in detail a matter of great debate (among scholars) for decades. (As a matter of fact,) a lot of people had discussed the topic without considering of the reality and without proper analysis of the matter. (Therefore,) the book came out by Allah's grace as a complete work which provided evidences for all parties involved in the argument, alongside backing them up with reasonable and revelational evidences on the need to unite Muslims in matters of fasting and breaking of fast and going by the sighting of the first country to sight the crescent for Ramadan or Shawwal.

Initially when the book was published, it ran out of copies due to high demand in the market, given the level of importance it was to Muslims because of the great deal of knowledge and beneficial analysis it highlighted.

I have not commented on the book as a whole but left it as it is due to its independence, except for where the author criticized Mu'awiyah – May Allah be pleased with him and the ahadith[1] on the merits of Syria. Brother ***Hamza*** has studied the work, commented, added topics to it and referenced the Qur'anic verses mentioned. Sometimes too, he had to clear the word "Fasl" which appeared in the original work.

The matter of criticizing the companions was something for which the author was condemned. He did so due to his level of Shiism, even though he did not get to the level of total condemnation of the companions (R.A.) – May Allah have mercy on him. As for the matter of the ahadith on the merits of Syria, his student, ***Muhammad bun al-Ameen Bu Khubzah*** – may Allah preserve him – has mentioned that the shaikh later revised his stance and accepted them as authentic. The student stated this in his commentary on the book "***al-Bahr al-'Ameeq fi Marwiyyat ibn as-Siddiq***".

Regarding the rest of the matters discussed in the book, they are all knowledge based with arguments accepted in the academic field. Therefore, there is no need writing plenty footnotes addressing them.

I ask Allah the Exalted to make this piece beneficial and to place it on the scale of good deeds of the author and the publisher and may He repay them in kindness. All thanks and praises be unto Allah, the Lord of the universe.

[1] Plural form of *hadith.*

Biography of Al-Hafiz Al-Ghumari

Name: Abu al-Fayd Ahmad bun Muhammad bun as-Siddiq al-Ghumari. He was said to be related to the Messenger ﷺ from his paternal bloodline. Also related to Ahmad bun Ajibah (1224 A.H.).

Birth: born on Friday, 20th Ramadan, 1320 A.H. in the tribe of Bani Sa'ad, a village near that of Bani Ghumari. After two months, his father moved him to Tangier.

Academic journey:

- Started with Qur'an memorization at age 5 under the tutelage of al-Arabi bun Ahmad Budarrah.
- After committing the Qur'an to memory, he focused on memorizing Ajurumiyyah, al-Murshid al-Mu'een, Bulugh al-Maram, as-Sanusiyyah, Alfiyyah of Ibn Malik, al-Jawharah, al-Bayquniyyah, Mukhtasar al-Khaleel, etc. from the collection of academic books, widely studied at the time in Morocco.
- After he wrote his first book "Riyad at-Tanzeeh", he developed an interest in the field of hadith and dedicated his time studying it.
- He performed pilgrimage at age 9, alongside his dad in 1329 A.H and went to al-Azhar in Egypt in the year 1339 A.H.

Teachers:

1. Al–Allamah al-Muqri al-Arabi bun Ahmad Budarrah al-Gharbi.
2. His dad, al-Allamah al-Murabbi Muhammad bun as-Siddiq al-Ghumari (1354 A.H.)
3. Al-Allamah as-Sufi Ahmad bun Abdul Salaam al-Iyaadi as-Sumayhi (1361 A.H.)
4. Al-Allamah ash-Shafi'e Muhammad Imam as-Saqa al-Misri (1354 A.H.)

5. Shaikh ash-Shafi'eyyah of Egypt, al-Allamah Muhammad ash-Sharqawi an-Najdi (1350 A.H.)
6. Al-Imam al-Faqih Muhammad Bukhayt al-Mutee'ee al-Hanafi (1354 A.H.)
7. Al-Allamah al-Faqih Muhammad bun Ibrahim as-Samaluti al-Maliki (1353 A.H.)
8. Al-Allamah ash-Shaikh Ahmad bun Nasr al-'Adawi al-Maliki (1347 A.H.)
9. Al-Allamah al-Athari 'Umar bun Hamdan al-Mahrisi al-Madani (1368 A.H.)
10. Al-Imam al-Muhaddith Muhammad bun Ja'far bun Idriss al-Kattani al-Hassani (1345 A.H.)
11. Al-Imam Ahmad bun Muhammad al-Khayyat az-Zakari al-Hassani (1343 A.H.)
12. Al-Imam al-Muhaddith Muhammad bun Idriss al-Kadiri al-Hassani (1350 A.H.)
13. Al-Allamah al-Musnid Ahmad bun Rafi' at-Tahtawi al-Hassani (1355 A.H.)
14. Shaikh ad-Diyar ash-Shamiyyah Muhammad Badar ad-Deen al-Baibani ad-Dimashki (1354 A.H.)

Students:

1. Al-Allamah ash-Shareef Abu al-Fatuh Abdullah bun Abdil Kadir at-Taleedi al-Hassani
2. Al-Allamah al-Bahaathah (the esteemed researcher) ash-Shareef Muhammad bun al-Ameen Bu Khubzah al-'Umrani
3. Al-Allamah ash-Shareef Muhammad al-Muntasir bi-LLAH al-Kattani

And a lot more.

His creed:

Shaikh's student, Bu Khubzah – May Allah preserve him – stated concerning his Shaikh:

"Shaikh Ahmad bun as-Siddiq was my teacher and in-law and I have spent a lot of time with him. He was unique in knowledge, courtesy and demeanor. A hafiz, researcher and firmly rooted he was in the Hadith sciences. He was a Salafi in creed and partisanship, fighting against blind partisanship and subscribing to a single school of Islamic jurisprudence but khalafi in some of that. Also, he was a deep mystic, a believer of Wahdat al-Wujud[1]. Again, he was Shaazili, Darqawi, a Shaikh of a special mystic path in Tangier[2]. He was also a Shiite, close enough to becoming a Rafidi. His strange condition was in line with the saying of at-Tufi al-Hanbali:

A Hanbali, Rafidi and Ash'ari

It is indeed, one of the biggest crises!

His Madhhab:

He was not partisan to any known Madhhab but believed in Ijtihad on all matters. Following evidence was his quest, even when it went against the opinion of the Jumhur (majority of scholars).

Death:

He was bedridden for eight months from heart attack and finally demised on a Sunday, the beginning of Jumada al-Akhir in 1380 A.H.

[1] A concept that shows the uniformity of the Creator and his creations. This belief negates any element of difference between the two. It was a doctrine rejected by the majority of Islamic scholars due to the disbelief it contains. A key individual with this belief was Ibn 'Arabi al-Hatimi (1240 C.E.).

[2] A city in north-western Morocco.

Drawing Attention to the Unification of Muslims in Fasting and Breaking the Fast

1. Each country should consider its own crescent sighting

   This opinion is defective for many reasons, among which is:

   i. The hadith (Fast upon sighting the crescent) cannot be explained to mean each country should consider its own sighting. Linguistically, it is impossible to explain a statement like "do not do" as referring to each unit in a set but rather the entire set.

   ii. The claimed explanation would need a phrase to become complete. Therefore, we either assume it to be "O people of a land, consider your own crescent sighting different from that of any land 24 Farsakh[1] or 480 Farsakh or 60 days distance away from your land."

   or

   "Consider your own crescent sighting different from that of any land with a different horizon of the sun".

   iii. This new meaning opposes the widely accepted meaning of the hadith.

   iv. The hadith of Kuraib cannot be used to substantiate this argument.

   v. A clearer picture that opposes this viewpoint is the hadith reported by Ibn 'Abbas. He said:

   "The people argued over the sighting of the crescent. While some said "Today", others said "Tomorrow". A Bedouin came to the Messenger ﷺ and claimed he had sighted the crescent. The

[1] A Farsakh is equivalent to 3 miles.

Messenger ﷺ then asked him: do you bear witness that there is no deity worthy of worship and that Muhammad is His Messenger? He responded, yes. Then the Messenger ﷺ instructed Bilal to announce to the people that "Observe the fast". Then he added "Observe the Saum (fasting in the month of Ramadan) by sighting the crescent and break the fast (bring the entire fasting period to an end) but if you are obstructed from sighting it by cloud then complete the month (30 days). Do not fast a day before (Ramadan)".

[Abu Dawud(2340), at-Tirmidhi (691), an-Nasa'ee (2113), Ibn Majah (1652) & ad-Daraqutni (2152)][1]

2. It is not mandatory for everyone to sight the crescent before fasting becomes obligatory on them or before the month of Ramadan commences

To substantiate this argument, let us consider the following:

i. Fasting becomes obligatory on the one who is present at the beginning of the month of Ramadan, not necessarily having sighted the crescent themselves, so far as it has been sighted by another person(s) and confirmed.

ii. The Messenger ﷺ together with his companions fasted a number of times without sighting the crescent themselves but rather depended on the sighting of others. Among those reported to have sighted the crescent were Abdullah bun 'Umar, a Bedouin, two Bedouins, and a caravan.

iii. The Ijma' (unanimous consensus) upon the fact that fasting is observed after confirmation of the sighting of two just individuals or that of a group of individuals.

iv. In the case of inability to sight the crescent, the month of Sha'ban is completed. Hence, no need to sight the crescent again.

[1] The hadith is weak. Al-Albani [Da'eef at-Tirmidhi (691)]

Hadith of Kuraib

It was narrated from Kuraib that Umm al-Fadl[1] bint al-Hârith sent him to Mu'âwiyah in Ash-Shâm. He said: "I arrived in Ash- Shâm and I finished her errand[2], and the crescent of Ramadân appeared while I was in Ash-Shâm, where I saw the crescent moon on the night of Friday. Then I came to Al-Madinah at the end of the month, and 'Abdullâh bin 'Abbâs [may Allah be pleased with them] asked me (about the crescent) said: 'When did you see the crescent?' I said: 'We saw it on the night of Friday.' He said: 'Did you see it?' I said: 'Yes, and the people saw it, and they fasted, and Mu'âwiyah fasted.' He said: 'But we saw it on the night of Saturday, and we will keep fasting until we complete thirty days, or we see it.' I said: 'Is the sighting and fasting of Mu'âwiyah not sufficient for you?' He said: 'No, this is what the Messenger of Allah ﷺ enjoined upon us."

[Muslim (1087), Abu Dawud (2332), an-Nasa'ee (2111) and at-Tirmidhi (693)]

Viewpoints of the four schools of Islamic jurisprudence on difference in horizons of the sun

i. AL-Malikiyyah, Al-Hanafiyyah and Al-Hanbaliyyah:

   Disregard for difference in horizons of the sun. Thus, when the crescent is sighted in a country, it becomes mandatory on the rest of the countries to commence their fast, for the Prophet's ﷺ statement "Fast by sighting it (the crescent)."

ii. Shafi'eyyah:

   Considers the difference in horizons of the sun.

   [Al-Mausu'ah al-Fiqhiyyah, v. 23, p. 142]

[1] Lubabah bint al-Harith bun Hazn al-Hilaliyyah (R.A.).
[2] Delivering her letter to Mu'awiyyah (R.A.).

The least number considered for Ramadan and Shawwal crescent sighting

a) Ramadan: the sighting of one just man is enough. This is the opinion of the major schools of Islamic jurisprudence, with the exception of ***Al-Malikiyyah*** that went by the sighting of two just men.

b) Shawwal (‘Eid al-Fitr): that of two just men.

The following are scholars’ opinions regarding the hadith of Kuraib and have been arranged according to their sources:

Nayl al-Autar Sharh Muntaqa al-Akhbar

Scholars with the opinion that the sighting of a country does not apply to another country held on to this Hadith by Kuraib and they differed in opinion concerning that as pointed out by (Ibn Hajar,) the author of Fath.[1]

i. The people of a land are to consider their own sighting and are not obligated to consider that of another country. Ibn al-Mundhir transmitted this from ‘Ikrimah, al- Qāsim bun Muhammad, Sālim and Ishaq. At-Tirmidhi also transmitted it from the scholars while al-Māwardī reported it as an opinion within the Shafi’e school of Islamic jurisprudence.

ii. When the supreme Imam considers the sighting of another country, it becomes enjoining on his people because the entire land with respect to him is like a single land and his authority spans across it, said by Ibn al-Mājishūn.

iii. Close countries may share sighting from their counterparts. However, there are two opinions regarding distant countries. Majority of scholars went by the fact that it is not obligatory to consider sighting from a distant country. This is the opinion of the Shafi’e school.

[1] Fath al-Bari

Abu at-Tayyib and others opined it was obligatory and al-Baghawi transmitted it from ash-Shafi'e.

There are different factors to consider in measuring distance and they are:

a. ***Difference of horizons:*** asserted by the Iraqis and as-Saydalaniy. An-Nawawi also affirmed it in ar-Raudah and Sharh al-Muhadhdhab.

b. ***Distance that permits shortening prayer:*** asserted by al-Baghawi and validated by ar-Rafi'e and an-Nawawi.

c. ***Difference of regions:*** he (Ibn Hajar) reported this in Fath (al-Bari).

d. ***The impediment factor:*** any country that is likely to see it as seen by their neighbours without an obscuring obstacle is bound by the sighting of that particular neighbouring country, as reported by as-Sarakhsi.

e. The fifth is similar to Ibn al-Majishun's earlier statement.

f. In an instance where the dependent country and the depending country differ in landscape, such that one is mountainous and the other flat or if each land lies in a different climatic region, then they are not to share the same sighting, as reported by al-Mahdi in al-Bahr from al-Imam Yahya and al-Hadawiyyah. Their cited proof was the very hadith of Kuraib and the manner of reasoning was the fact Ibn 'Abbas did not regard the sighting of the people of Syria but he said at the latter part of the Hadith: "***this is what the Messenger of Allah ﷺ enjoined upon us."*** This proves that he preserved from the Messenger ﷺ that it is not mandatory on the people of a land to regard the sighting of another.

Know that the proof lies in the report related to the Messenger ﷺ by Ibn 'Abbas (R.A.) and not in his Ijtihad as comprehended from him

by people and as indicated by his statement "***this is what the Messenger of Allah ﷺ enjoined upon us***". What he meant by this was his statement "***we will keep fasting until we complete thirty days***". The command from the Messenger ﷺ was as reported by al-Bukhari and Muslim and others, with the wording:
"***Do not fast until you sight the crescent and do not break the fast[1] until you sight it. If it is obscured from you then complete the count to thirty days***". [al-Bukhari (1906) and Muslim (1080]

Furthermore, this is not limited to people of a specific region but rather a directive for all Muslims to whom it applies. Hence, using it as evidence for obligating the sighting of a land on the people of other lands is more suited than as proof to disapprove such sighting because when the people of a land sight the crescent then it means Muslims have sighted it and therefore becomes binding on other lands.

Even if we are to accept that Ibn 'Abbas's statement indicates non-obligation of one land acting upon another's sighting, such non-obligation would be constrained by rational evidence such that the distance between the two regions would permit a difference in horizons. Failure of Ibn 'Abbas to act upon the sighting of the people of Syria despite the absence of a distance that would permit such difference amounts to an act of personal reasoning and hence, not a conclusive binding evidence.

Setting aside the restriction, no scholar questions the fact that the evidences suggest that people from different regions comply with each other's reports and testimonies in all court rulings, including those related to moon sighting, irrespective of whether the distance between the two regions permits horizon differences. Here, specification would not be accepted in the absence of proof. Even if

[1] For 'Eid celebration.

the hadith of Kuraib was deemed suitable for specification, this would go against analogy and should only be applied to the text's locus if it is clear or to its inferred meaning if it is ambiguous.

Now, Ibn ‘Abbas did not come up with a clear specification or even terminology carrying such meaning, which would have permitted us to examine its generality and specification. Instead, he presented a generalization that alluded to a specific instance, where the people of Madinah did not regard the sighting of the people of Syria, assuming that was indeed what was intended. We did not comprehend anything from it beyond that. Therefore, it would be necessary to limit it to what is known from this incident—which is against analogy—in order to make it a specifier of that general command without extending it further.

Possibly, it was for a reason beyond our comprehension. If we concede the validity of stretching the ruling and specifying the general command by it, the utmost it would entail would be applicability to places whose distance is equal to or greater than the one between Madinah and Syria; as for distances less than that, then no. This is clear and hence; it is important to examine the proof of those who held considering postal stage (barīd), district or town in preventing acting upon another’s sighting.

The most reliable view is that of the Maliki school of Islamic jurisprudence and a group from az-Zaydiyyah. Al-Mahdi among them chose it and al-Qurtubi reported from his teachers that if the people of a land sight the crescent, then it becomes binding on all lands. Ibn ‘Abdil Barr claimed that this statement defies unanimous consensus among the scholars because they only agreed that sighting is not regarded for extremely distant lands, such as Khurāsān and al-Andalus. However, this claim should be

disregarded because such groups opposing it dismisses the acclaimed consensus.

Al-Bahr al-Muhit ath-Thajjaj fi Sharh Sahih Muslim bin al-Hajjaj

i. Each country should consider their own local sighting: this was reported from Abdullah bun ‘Abbas (R.A.), Ikrimah, Al-Qāsim bun Muhammad, Salim bun Abdillah, Ishaq bun Rahuyah.

ii. If confirmed that a certain country sighted the moon then the people of a country learning of it at a later date should make up for the fast upon receiving the news: al-Laith bun Sa’d, ash-Shafi’e, Ahmad bun Hanbal and that is al-Imam Malik’s opinion, according to a report by Ibn al-Qāsim.

iii. According to the Madinites from the Maliki school of Islamic jurisprudence, Imam Malik’s opinion was that only the country that sighted the crescent is obligated to fast, unless if the supreme Imam of another country chooses to follow their sighting but if it is in a disunited community then no.

iv. Ibn Abdil Barr preferred local sighting and went on to support his argument by stating that Ibn ‘Abbas’s (R.A.) hadith is enough proof. Moreover, people are not imposed with what is beyond their capabilities. Abu al-’Abbas al-Qurtubi said: Ibn ‘Abbas’s (R.A.) statement “This is what the Messenger of Allah ﷺ enjoined upon us” is a proof that countries far apart from each other should consider their local sightings.

However, a big country with many subregions and countries close to each other may base on the same sighting. The noticeable factor here is the distance. Also, in the presence of supreme Imam of the land, his decision on moon-sighting becomes binding and it is unacceptable to defy his decision.

v. Al-Hafiz (Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalani) pointed out: The scholars had different views on moonsighting:

- First – Each country must consider its own local sighting. The hadith of Ibn ‘Abbas in Sahih Muslim attests to this. This is transmitted by Ibn al-Mundhir from ‘Ikrimah, al-Qāsim, Salim and Ishaq. At-Tirmidhi also transmitted from scholars of knowledge and did not report any other viewpoint. Al-Māwardī as well transmitted as an opinion within the Shafi’e school of Islamic jurisprudence.

- Second – After confirming its sighting in a country, fasting becomes mandatory on all nations. This is the most popular view within the Maliki school of Islamic jurisprudence. Nevertheless, Ibn ‘Abdil Barr mentioned a consensus on its opposite, i.e., each country considering its own sighting.

- Some from the Shafi’e school of Islamic jurisprudence stated: if nations are close to one another then they may share the same sighting. However, if they are far apart, there are two views:
  (a) According to the majority, it is not compulsory to share the same sighting. This was the opinion of Abu at-Attayib.
  (b) Another group ruled it to be compulsory, as transmitted by al-Baghawi from ash-Shafi’e.

  Note:
  The following are factors for determining distance between countries with regard to moonsighting:

  i. ***Ikhtilaf al-Matali’ (Difference of horizons)***
     The Iraqi intellectuals including as-Saydalani firmly maintained this. An-Nawawi also supported it in ar-Raudatuh Nadiyyah Sharh al-Muhadhdhab.

  ii. ***Masafat al-Qasr (Distance that permits shortening prayer)***

This was held by al-Imam[1] and al-Baghawi. ar-Rafi'e endorsed it in as-Saghir and an-Nawawi in Sharh Muslim.[2]

iii. Ikhtilaf al-Aqaleem (Difference of regions)

iv. The impediment factor

As-Sarakh'sī reported that, in contrast to other localities, every locality is bound [by the sighting] when it cannot be fairly concealed from them without some obstacle.

v. ***The earlier view of Ibn al-Majishun.***

This was mentioned in al-Fath.

vi. The compiler, may Allah the Most High have mercy on him, stated: "In my opinion, the strongest opinion is the one that considers the difference of horizons.

In sum, countries with different horizons must maintain their own local sighting because the hadith of Ibn 'Abbas is a clear proof on this. Also, the difference of horizons is applied in determining prayer times. For example, the Zuhr prayer does not become mandatory on everyone in the world upon reaching the zenith in a country but rather, on the people of the specific country. The same concept applies here and Allah knows best.

In refuting Ibn 'Abbas's (R.A.) statement, ash-Shawkani in Nayl al-Autar went on at length to even point out that it was his personal Ijtihad. So, he made quite strange claims as he tried rejecting Ibn 'Abbas's statement without convincing evidence. Him interpreting Ibn Abbas's statement "This is what the Messenger of Allah ﷺ enjoined upon us" to mean "Fast when you see it" was a weak claim and an unfair interpretation. Well, Ibn 'Abbas was eloquent and well versed in jurisprudence and he explicitly reported that the Messenger ﷺ instructed them as stated. Apparently, he ﷺ instructed them to fast based on their own sighting

[1] Imam al-Haramayn Abu al-Ma'ali al-Juwayni (478 A.H,).
[2] Al-Minhaj Sharh Sahih Muslim bun al-Hajjaj.

and not that of distant lands and Allah, the Exalted knows best and what is accurate. To Him is the final return and resort.

“I only desire reform so far as I am able, to the best of my power. And my guidance cannot come except from Allah, in Him I trust and unto Him I repent.” [Surah Hud: 88]

The size of the crescent does not matter

Clarifying That It Does Not Matter Whether the Crescent Is Large or Small, For Allah, the Most High, Causes It To Appear For Long Enough That People Can See It, And If It Is Cloudy Then Thirty Days Should Be Completed.

Narrated that Abü A1-Bakhtari said: “We went out for 'Umrah, and when we stopped in Batn Nakhlah, we looked for the crescent and we saw it. Some of the people said: 'It is three nights old,' and some of them said: 'It is two nights old.' Then we met Ibn 'Abbâs and we said: 'We have spotted the crescent; some of the people said that it was three nights old, and some of them said that it was two nights old.' He said: 'On what night did you see it?' We said: 'On such-and-such a night.' He said: 'The Messenger of Allah [said: "Indeed Allah] causes it to appear for long enough that it can be seen, so on the night that you saw it, that was when it appeared.” [Muslim (1088)]

Their argument was based on the size of the moon at that moment. His statement “so on the night that you saw it, that was when it appeared” is an indication that crescent sighted before sunset is not considered. Thus, sighting it on the 30th night of Sha’ban or at daytime in Ramadan, whether before or after midday, it is not to be ruled for the previous night nor for the forthcoming day. On that basis, one is not supposed to break their fast nor begin fasting from Sha’ban. Rather, if the crescent is sighted after sunset, then it is ruled for the forthcoming night; otherwise, no. For what was reported from ‘Umar (R.A.) that he sent a directive to his army in Iraq stating “These crescents, some are bigger than others. Hence, when you sight the crescent during the daytime, do not break your fast until two (just) witnesses give out their evidences that they sighted it the night before.”

Again, it is authentically transmitted from Ibn ‘Umar (R.A.) that some people saw the crescent for ‘Eid al-Fitr at daytime but he completed his fast and said: no, until it is sighted from where it is sighted at night. In a different narration: it is not suitable for us to break (the fast) until you sight it (the moon) at night from where it is sighted.

Al-Bayhaqi said: We have reported this view from ‘Uthman and Ibn Mas’ud. Others said: and from ‘Ali and Anas. There is no known disagreement over this from them. Malik also reported in a Balagh[1] report that the crescent was sighted in the late evening during the era of ‘Uthman (R.A.) but he did not break his fast until evening.

A faction of the Salaf went by the opinion: if the crescent is sighted before the time the sun reaches the zenith, then it is for the night before but for the upcoming night when sighted after reaching the zenith. The compiler – may Allah have mercy on him - however, went by the first opinion due to the clarity of the first statement “On the night that you saw it, that was when it appeared.”

On this note, we bring our discussion to an end, hoping as a reader, you have benefitted from this piece. May Allah accept from us all and may He uplift the spirit of Muslims around the globe and unite them upon good course. Peace be unto you.

Abdul Basit Abdallah

February 15, 2026.

[1] A type of narration in which the narrator says “it has reached me” without clearly mentioning who he reported from and this is a type of Munqati’ (disconnected) hadith. It usually takes the form “Balaghani (It has reached me) or Balaghana (it has reached us). Such chain of narration is not complete. Even though Balagh reports are weak by themselves, they are considered when reported with complete chain. Also, Balagh reports by al-Imam Malik in his al-Muwatta’ is regarded, especially since Ibn ‘Abdil Barr transmitted them with complete chains in ***at-Tamheed*** with the exception of four narrations, which were completed by Ibn as-Salah in ***Wasl Balaghat al-Arba’ah fi al-Muwatta.***

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